

## THE PATENT MEDICINE EVIL.\*

By PHILIP KING BROWN, M. D., San Francisco.

There are always four parties to the patent medicine evil—the manufacturer, the newspaper, the distributor, and the victim, and also too often the public hospital and the undertaker. It is not my purpose to point out the responsibility of those unscrupulous beings who prey upon the anxiety and depression of the sick by making and advertising substances which they claim will cure all of the common and most of the serious ailments of mankind. So bald and raw did their evil efforts become that the Federal Government finally clipped their wings by the passage of a pure-food law, causing some of them to suspend operations and forcing all of them to curtail their claims to a considerable degree. A long distance more must legislation go, before the skill of these nefarious individuals in getting their preposterous wares before the public can be circumvented. Ministers of the gospel, broken down nurses and doctors and socially prominent, but impecunious individuals, are the tools of this class, and schools in salesmanship are maintained by some of the more notorious of these vultures, all in an effort to elude the law and reach the public in some insidious way.

Newspapers have denied their responsibility of being censors of the morals and ethics of advertisers. They claim that they are not in the business for their health, and it is certain that they are not in it for the public's either. So powerful are the advertisers of patent medicines who must keep their wares before the public, that they have been able not only to buy the press with few exceptions, but to line up the press against any local legislation inimical to their interests. A free country and a free press! Yes, if one has money enough the country is fairly free and the press can be made free enough to say anything, even that black is white.

It is to the third party to the patent medicine evil—the distributor—that I wish to direct special attention. Most medicines, patent, proprietary and otherwise, pass through the hands of wholesale and retail druggists to the laity, but we cannot escape the unfortunate fact that doctors themselves have only too often been guilty of helping to disseminate some patent medicines. In so far as they are responsible they deserve the severest censure and any punishment that their fellows could justly inflict upon them. It is an evidence on their part of ignorance, indifference, and slovenly morals, for they have promised on being graduated into the medical profession to be guided by full investigation and knowledge of fact in all they do.

The wholesale druggist has escaped the public condemnation which he should have for his part in the distribution of patent medicines. He need not handle them at all; he could even handle them in single units; but not so; he is directed by the manufacturer to dispose of them on request from retailers in unbroken packages. And so there is dumped on the retailer, who wishes to hold all the

trade he can, a dozen or two bottles or boxes of a patent medicine, when all he wanted to fill some order or prescription was a few ounces. With a whole case of the drug to dispose of the retailer only too often places it in a showy place to catch the eye of the solicitous searcher for health. So bad has this condition become that the manufacturer has been able to unload his wares all over the country, forcing even some of the highest class druggists to handle his nefarious doses. The further down in the scale of druggists one goes the worse is the evil, until near the bottom one finds the stores filled with patent medicines, with a shelf or two over a sink where a few established remedies are mixed and dispensed.

The metamorphosis of fully half of the druggists under the impact of modern greed is the most amazing feature of the patent medicine evil. Time was when the skilled chemist and compounder of doctors' prescriptions was their faithful ally in the healing art. But that time has passed and now far the most of the druggists are equally bound to another master whom they endeavor to serve without injury to their ancient prestige. That they continue to serve two masters whose interests are diametrically opposed is a triumph of skill and dual personality. That they continue to serve them without protest from any one is proof of the ignorance of the many and the cynical tolerance of the responsible few. Obviously they have so far clouded the real situation that to their original ally they say: "We are forced to carry the goods of the patent medicine man because the doctors order them and the public wants them." Nor is this all, nor the worst. Eager for a share of the swag they have gone a step farther, and capitalizing the public's eternal susceptibility to the largest pretension in the gaudiest form, they put up their own remedies for ailments, simple and complex, prescribe willingly over the counter, and adorn their show-cases and windows with large attractive bottles of cure-alls, greater in bulk and lesser in price than the contents of the doctor's prescriptions, and far more alluring in promise.

How insidious must be the suggestion of such a drug store to the sick and waiting patient who takes in a prescription to be compounded! While he waits, magic philtres play upon his hyper-sensitive sensibilities. Rows and rows of pleasing panaceas promise immediate alleviation of every known ill, from baldness to sudden death. And venturing among the luxuriant verbiage of the ads and testimonials he recognizes the very symptoms as his own. When finally he takes his expensive bottle (for which he has waited an hour), he sallies forth with a vivid mental picture of the much larger bottle at half the price, for the very malady the doctor said he had. The spell has come upon him and henceforth he is the marked-down victim. Suppose he is not better in a few days—the much larger bottle at half the price will suddenly flash into consciousness and in the suggestible state of most sick men he will try the remedy he has seen so temptingly advertised.

He has paid the high cost of looking.

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And what a perfectly logical reaction it is. A master psychologist is your vender of nostrums, knowing well his American public—an uncritical public fed on the pseudo-science of the Sunday supplement and the pseudo-psychology of New Thought, Christian Science and Home of Truth, and finding in the pat phrase an excellent substitute for thought. Such a public will fall for the striking label and the flamboyant ad., as it falls for the catchy slogan in politics, or the pocket wisdom of the phrasemongers, without recourse to the painful process of cerebration. Thus the appeal of the glamorous drug store is potent and the doping of symptoms begins—and with it the pathos of money wasted that can ill be spared, of precious time lost that can be spared still less, of habits formed that are beyond all cure. (Do you observe in passing, the enterprising instigator of habits still preserving his ancient prestige?)

The extent and variety of the symptom-dosing may be judged from a brief analysis of the commonest types of nostrums. Roughly we may divide them into three kinds:

(1) Those that cheer and yet inebriate, the contraband cocktails, so to speak, the festive Perunas, the joyous Swamp-Roots and the omnipresent Creme de Pinkhams;

(2) Those that soothe while they depress; the orangenies, bromo-seltzers, et al.;

(3) Those that fill you with false hope and harmless dope at \$1.00 per 10 cents' worth. Of such as this is the much-exploited sanatogen, and the multitude of mitigated waters.

It is the subconscious sprees of the first class that swell the ranks of the liquor-users with thousands upon thousands of innocent toppers,—women, professed white-ribboners and rebellious natives of prohibition districts. Dr. Ashbel Grinnell of New York, who has made a statistical study of patent medicines, estimates that more alcohol is consumed in patent medicines than in all the spirituous liquors sold by licensed liquor venders. The sudden increase of sales in "bitters," "sarsaparillas," "perunas" and "celery compounds" which everywhere follows a prohibition victory, tells its own story. Maine and Kansas and Oklahoma may have their accustomed jag while the druggist flourishes like a green bay tree.

To the headache powders, catarrh cures and acetanilide compounds generally, we owe a frightful increase in the number of neurotics, drug habitués and defective, if not criminal, classes, and they are taken in all innocence to stimulate heart action, produce better blood, and soothe the nerves (as the ads. so persuasively claim). The effect is quite the reverse,—they depress the heart, they contribute to anemia, they temporarily deaden, only to induce greater excitability, or a more poignant pain. In fact the only thing they do stimulate is a craving for more, and this craving persistently fostered by deceptive labels, and catered to by complacent nostrum venders, leads ultimately to the breakdown of physical, mental and moral integrity.

To the third class belong those much megaphoned elixirs of life that periodically set the

world agog, run their little course of gulling and beguiling the world's fools and finally lapse into the limbo of things outplayed. These are the "liquozones" and "sanatogens"—innocuous frauds that promise the tired business man, and the nervous wreck, life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness on a capital stock of three-grains-of-corn.

But of all the frauds perpetrated by the patent medicine exploiters none is so tragic and heartless as the consumption-cure fakes, and none are more commonly indulged in, or more devoutly believed. To prescribe a drug where no drug will cure, to break down the resistive power, to encourage the relaxation of those rigorous rules of living, through which only can these sufferers be saved,—herein lies the cruelty and viciousness of those "cures." All who work with the tuberculous know the sadness of those last stage cases who have sacrificed the potentialities of cure to the deceits of "ozomulsions," "tuberculozyne," and "tubercleclide."

Just how strong is the habit of symptom drug-giving may be learned in a sanatorium. In my experience at Arequipa (a sanatorium at Manor, Cal., for early tuberculosis among wage-earning women) the daily appeal for drugs for every trivial ailment, every slightest irregularity of function, is a revelation of long-established habits of self-diagnosis and self-prescription. Is there one wakeful night? The demand is for a sleeping powder. A day of nervous instability? The plea is for bromide. A headache from whatever source, calls for antikamnia, while the nightly procession of kimonos calling for "salts" is a thing to stand the hair on end. In an effort to break this habit we have made it a rule never to grant a patient what she prescribes for herself even though she hits on the right remedy, and to charge patients for drugs for any condition other than the tuberculosis.

An episode which illustrates the hold of the skilfully advertised patent medicine on the credulous and misguided laity may not be amiss:

A prominent lawyer once asked me why the medical profession was so narrow on the subject of patent medicine. He stated as an illustration that the local manager of the Fulton Compound Remedy for Bright's Disease and Diabetes, a classmate of his at a leading university, had shown him that day the extraordinary collection of testimonials from people cured of these diseases. I might have argued with him till doomsday that the facts would not bear out the testimonials, and failed to convince him, so I chose to make it worth his while to produce the proof, if he could, by offering him a large sum—\$500.00—if he could produce a single case of chronic Bright's disease where three reputable physicians had concurred in the diagnosis and where Fulton's Compound had later effected a cure. He returned jubilant the following day with the story of a certain Judge B., well known in San Francisco, who was told by a prominent surgeon and later by his able assistant, that his ailment causing some heart disturbance was in reality chronic Bright's disease. Upon leaving the care of these two physicians the patient applied for a pension and was granted it after examination by a

board of army physicians on the diagnosis of chronic Bright's disease. The proof of the disease I could not dispute. After receiving the pension, friends persuaded the judge to try Fulton's Compound, which he did, and my lawyer friend reported him cured and produced a copy of his testimonial. I asked for a chance to examine the patient's urine, adding that I should prove by this very case the fraud which I knew had been perpetrated on the judge. I was never permitted to examine the urine and later learned that tests of the urine made by the Fulton Compound's own chemist showed half of one per cent. albumen, and the accompanying evidences of the chronic disease. The patient from over-effort during his kidney disease had heart symptoms; a rest and diet under his physicians' care relieved them and he was again a chronic nephritis case without subjective symptoms. Fulton's Compound may have done no harm, it certainly did not cure, and I doubt if it even did any good. It is fair to add that the manager appreciated the fraud he had innocently been perpetrating on the public and resigned his job, but the proprietors of this abominable atrocity still advertise their reputed cures and grow fat on their wicked gains.

But perhaps later you say, what of the druggist's defense that "the doctors prescribe patent medicines." A little investigating disposes of this. Letters to druggists in several parts of San Francisco representing the extremes of social conditions brought out these facts. Among the first-class drug stores patronized by the well-to-do, only one to three per cent. of the doctors' prescriptions called for patent medicines, while in several of the stores in outlying or poorer districts the number of prescriptions calling for these remedies in whole or part reached eight to twelve per cent. It is evident from this that we cannot escape some part of the responsibility of this distribution, though it is interesting to observe that the universal testimony of the best druggists was strongly against handling patent medicines and their use by doctors and that the demand for them from the laity is steadily declining.

Why then you may ask, try to regulate the druggist who is but one cog in the machinery of exploitation? Why not educate the public? Expose the frauds? Jack up the manufacturers? Insist on enforcement of the pure food and drugs act?

These methods have one and all been tried, and with partial success. Each has its limitations or its clogging technicalities and the sale of nostrums goes on. The processes of public education are slow and with our fundamentally faulty school system, far from sure. Curricula loaded with fads and frills but innocent of any training of the reasoning faculty, or the powers of observation and deduction, are largely responsible for the crimes of credulity which undermine the public health. Publicity campaigns are more immediately successful, but thrive chiefly as a nine-day sensation. In 1905 Collier's Weekly printed its exposé of the great American fraud with sensational effect and a net

result of fifty per cent. reduction in the sale of patent medicines.

The A. M. A., in an effort to prolong this effect, issued a series of reprints and added a few choice revelations of its own which were disseminated broadcast over the country. The Post Office Department, through its provisions against fraud, has held up many vicious concoctions en route to the gullible. The Federal Food and Drugs Act has exercised what powers it has but these have strange unaccountable limitations and through chinks in the law many fakes contrive to escape. For instance, it is illegal to lie on the label but quite permissible to lie on a circular, a newspaper ad., or a show window. It is obligatory to declare on the trade package the composition and origin of a patent medicine, but these same important items may be omitted from a show card. The deadly compound which records its percentage of alcohol, morphine, acetanilide in very small type on the label may describe itself largely and engagingly as "mountain air in the veins," "wings of the morning" or "the quintessence of youth, beauty and the joy of living," in a single pill. The amount of alcohol, morphine, opium, cocain, heroin, eucain, chloroform, cannabis indica, chloral hydrate, and acetanilide, must be declared, but nothing need be said to indicate the presence of such dangerous drugs as prussic acid, aconite, arsenic and strychnine. Furthermore the Federal Law controls only the drugs which pass from state to state in interstate commerce, and has not one iota of authority over the drugs sold in the same state where they are manufactured. And when in the course of a Federal investigation of some suspected fraud, important discoveries are made, these findings are buried in official archives and never reach the public, the while prosecuting procedure drags and drags.

Such being the limitations of the law and the slow, cumbersome movement of its machinery, we come back to the druggist. How shall we make it possible for him to turn down the patent medicines, make a living and honestly maintain his ancient prestige?

I am convinced from a discussion of the whole subject with the high class druggists, that they hate the patent medicine situation as badly as do the doctors and that they would unite with the profession in putting it out of business, at least as far as they could through their channels. Would it not be possible, therefore, to establish in each community a list of druggists who were willing to keep no patent medicines for sale and who would refuse to compound any prescriptions calling for them? Let the medical society of each community publish through its notices of meetings a list of such drug stores to be known as the "white list" and let the secretary of the society distribute a few of these lists with each notice of meeting. In this way when patients ask "to what drug store shall I take this prescription?" it would be possible to do a very reasonable bit of advertising of the first-class places, who in return for this advertising protect their patrons and help to establish again the

proper relation between doctor and druggist. San Francisco advertises in this way the dairies that produce certified milk and the dairies that have passed an inspection as to hygienic conditions. It may be cutting down the work of doctors to thus point out how to rid the community of diseases due to bad milk and it may cut down the work of doctors to supply patients with good drugs, but I am sure this is the kind of lessening of our work that will not be objected to by any physician, and it would make it possible and profitable for the druggist to regain his old status as the physician's faithful ally in the healing art.

### THE ABORTION EVIL IN A SMALL TOWN.

By WM. B. SMITH, M. D., Randsburg.

Probably the abortion evil is no greater in the small town in proportion to the number of inhabitants, than in the city, but it is certainly more conspicuous, and knowledge of the usual methods used to produce abortion seems to be almost universal among the women of this small town. That this should be so is, I believe, due to three factors: first, while an old quiet mining town, it is a saloon town of rather low moral standards; second, the people here are all pretty generally acquainted and it is easy for one woman to get the help of another wise in the ways of the world; and third, but not least, some previous practitioner here has been unrestrained by morals, law, or training from gathering in the dollars from this source, as is shown conclusively by the attitude of the half dozen women who have come to my office in the three months of my residence here with the idea of securing relief from an unwelcome pregnancy.

The "sop to conscience" used by one predecessor is common comment among the women here and was passed on to me by my wife. When approached by a woman seeking relief he is reported to have answered them, "I am not allowed to do abortions by the rules of my profession, but if you start it by using a stiff rubber catheter I will finish it for you and see that no harm comes to you." What a sense of security and safety must have followed him about, a sort of visible halo, among the women of the community! In running to earth the causes of the unexpected peritonitis and death of my first Mexican patient here, following cervical repair and shortening of the round ligaments, I learned that she had had seven curettements in the last three years and had successfully aborted herself some four weeks before coming to me for the repair work. This woman spoke no English and my only means of talking to her was through an interpreter. The indications for the repair work were definite, but only after her death was I able to learn the above details that would have warned me to delay operation for some weeks or months until all danger of spreading a latent endometritis was passed. No wonder this unlettered woman was able to interfere with herself successfully, she had been thoroughly taught and was entirely ignorant of the dangers involved. One could have some measure of sympathy for a doctor who thought

this woman's seven children living were sufficient in a family where the father earns \$3.50 per day, if he had quietly instructed her how to avoid further pregnancy. But what can be said for one who repeatedly curetted her after pregnancy, charging this same three-fifty-a-day man \$25.00 each time his services were required!

How perfect has been the instruction in the community is again illustrated by a recent incomplete abortion which I had to finish. A young 200-pound matron of the community missed her menses, went to the next regular time, then decided she would relieve herself in the usual way. Some fore-handed neighbor woman supplied her with a stiff rubber catheter. Clad in a dirty kimona and old shoes, oiling the bent catheter, inserting a finger as guide, she claims that "one poke" was all she had to make with the instrument. She became frightened at the sudden profuse hemorrhage that followed, and sent a hurry call to me for help. Examination showed an old lacerated cervix which now admitted one finger easily and which bled so profusely at the least disturbance that a cervical and vaginal pack was needed to check it. A few pains during the night and one good expulsive pain the next morning delivered packing, foetus, and membranes, and I was again called to check the hemorrhage. The demeanor of this case throughout elicited not one sign of any feeling of wrong doing. She did not want a baby, she knew how to get rid of it, and what more simple than to rid herself of it! I wish some kind friend would tell me what to do with people like that!

So prevalent is this sort of knowledge in this town that I have been hesitating over a therapeutic abortion which I feel should be done for another patient of mine. The indications in this case are plain, simple, and imperative, yet I continue to hesitate for fear of being ranked in the popular mind with some of those who have gone before me. This woman has a baby under two years of age, and has now again missed her second menstrual epoch. She is still thirty pounds under weight, is anemic, and shows a thickened left pleura. With the birth of the first baby she was in bed for two months, first with thrombo-phlebitis of the left leg (milk leg she calls it), then with pleurisy with effusion, from which she finally recovered without tapping. She was cautioned at that time about becoming pregnant again, but she has been depending on her husband for preventive measures, and, as usual, this failed of efficiency. Now I shall have to relieve her sooner or later, but I sincerely wish she were financially able and willing to go to the city to have it done.

There are rays of sunshine through the darkness even of this benighted village. I have a woman now on my obstetric list five months along, and at least resigned to the inevitable, if not happy in the prospect of adding another to her family of one. After missing her second period she called upon my colleague in the town with a story of not being able to carry the child to term, and asked for relief. The doctor laughed at her, and then I was honored by a call with the same